

4. ALTERNATIVE PLANNING STRATEGIES

4.1 Introduction

Monroe County initiated the Livable CommuniKeys Program (LCP) in April 2000. The LCP was developed concurrently with the HCP and, while it focused on addressing the needs of the local citizens, all development alternatives were discussed in the context of the Key deer's biology. Like the HCP, the overall goal of the LCP was to determine the appropriate amount, type and location of development in the project area and the associated mitigation that would provide for community needs while maximizing conservation of the Key deer and other covered species.

Monroe County held public workshops and open houses to ascertain public views on planning and conservation issues; it used local media outlets and mailings to alert the public and to distribute surveys. Public workshops were held on April 6, May 25, and September 21, 2000 (Monroe County 2001a). The public's understanding of the habitat needs of the Key deer was facilitated during presentations and open discussion at three HCP meetings held in tandem with LCP meetings (see Section 1.2.2). Results of the community workshops and meetings were used to identify key community issues, develop planning objectives and generate conceptual land use alternatives and conservation strategies for the project area.

In the LCP workshops, the following key community issues were identified:

1. Ascertain the distribution of future residential development within the project area.
2. Maintain the rural character of the project area while still allowing some future development.
3. Implement solutions to the traffic congestion on US-1 and minimize the need for local trips on US-1.
4. Develop a community gathering facility and/or more active recreation facilities on Big Pine Key.
5. Discourage new development on No Name Key.

During the LCP process, Monroe County developed planning objectives to evaluate potential development scenarios. These objectives were based on the combined key issues expressed by the community, existing planning constraints and the existing habitat needs of the Key deer and other covered species. The ten objectives are:

1. Minimize the need for local vehicular trips on and across US-1, from north to south;

2. Improve the level of traffic service on US-1 to a standard that, in accordance with local regulations, would allow some development and to maintain that level of service over the planning horizon;
3. Discourage new development on No Name Key;
4. Encourage additional commercial development to be oriented to the local community rather than to the regional or tourist communities;
5. Continue to allow some development but generally keep the level low to achieve the maintenance of a “rural community” envisioned by the citizens;
6. Provide for a community gathering center and some active recreation;
7. Provide for a conservation plan with a reasonable level of implementation costs and logistics;
8. Provide for a conservation plan which complies with current regulatory constraints (for example, wetlands protection);
9. Provide greater certainty to the property owners and Key deer herd managers as to the location of future development; and
10. Minimize the alteration of undisturbed natural habitat.

4.2 Planning Strategies Analyzed

4.2.1 Planning Strategy #1: No Action Alternative/No Take

Under this strategy, no HCP would be prepared. With no improvement in the LOS for US-1, the building moratorium would continue indefinitely. No new residential, commercial or recreational development would occur within the project area. The community would retain its rural character, but no additional community facilities would be provided. With the construction of the wildlife underpasses and the intersection improvement project on US-1, Key deer mortality would be reduced and there would be a surplus of six deer over pre-construction conditions (FWS 1999).

4.2.2 Planning Strategy #2: Reduced Take

Recently completed US-1 projects result in a surplus of six deer. A reduced take alternative would involve a reduced amount of development that would overcome the surplus and result in no net take. The PVA model suggests (Table 2.2) that developing up to 300 low-H single family residential parcels, as well as three-laning US-1, would result in no net take. Under this alternative, important community needs would remain unsatisfied, such as community and government facilities expansions.

4.2.3 Planning Strategy #3: Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative provides for development activities that alleviate the building moratorium, improve the level of service on US-1, restore a low rate of growth in the study area, and offer community and public facilities improvements that satisfy community needs (see Section 3.5). With the avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures described in this HCP, no significant negative impacts on covered species are anticipated.

4.3 Comparison of Alternatives

Both the no action and reduced take alternatives were rejected mainly because they would impose undue restrictions on the community's ability to meet key needs, such as traffic improvements, while not providing significant added value to the conservation of the covered species. The proposed alternative provides for a development program that satisfies the community's needs for growth and infrastructure, while ensuring habitat protection in perpetuity for the conservation of covered species.